

present that we know. At the same time moral considerations, deprived of their supernormal backing, lose their accustomed force. God, we used to be told, takes delight in a good man. But once the practice of virtue is identified with pleasing God, it becomes difficult to ignore the respective consequences of His pleasure and His displeasure. Most religions have taken care to paint these consequences in the liveliest colours, with the result that it is difficult to say how much so-called virtuous conduct has been prompted by the desire to achieve an eternity of celestial bliss, and to avoid an eternity of infernal torments.

It is notorious to-day that heavenly rewards no longer attract and infernal punishments no longer deter with their pristine force; young people are frankly derisive of both, and, seeing no prospect of divine compensation in the next world for the wine and kisses that morality bids them eschew in this one, take more or less unanimously to the wine and kisses.

The resultant way of life is found less satisfactory than might have been expected. The objection to living for pleasure is that pleasure is so short-lived; repeat it and it no longer pleases. The objection to being able to do whatever you desire is that you quickly find that there is nothing that you desire to do. Hence the aimless and pointless character of much of modern Western life. We have revolted successfully against every kind of rule and authority, yet we are disillusioned with the results of revolt. We have shown the gods to be fictions, but we have still to come to terms with the needs that created the fictions.

In this impasse what assistance, if any, can we derive from the traditional wisdom of the East? Much, provided the wisdom of the East be stripped of the religious dogmas which have accrued around it. Common to all religions is the belief that the universe is in some important and fundamental sense, and, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, worth while. The appearances to the contrary include the everyday world and the everyday business of living in it. It follows that the everyday world is not the sole type of world; it may, indeed, be merely a mask or veil concealing a world of reality that underlies it. Further, it may be possible by living a certain kind of life to tear aside the mask and penetrate, however obscurely, behind the veil. Very well, then, it may be worth while to try to live the kind of life in question.

And here, I take it, we are within sight of the basic truth of all Eastern religions, which is that for those who live in a state of agitation, certain kinds of serene and lasting happiness, certain intellectual and creative processes, are impossible. Hence the religions of the East have insisted upon the systematic cultivation of mental quietness and the conscious pursuit of a certain way of life; in a word, they have laid down rules for the attainment of spiritual health.

Adopting them, we gain a criterion of value, a yardstick by which to measure and appraise the worth of our activities, which the current thought of the Western world fails to provide. Such a criterion of